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R E F L E C T I O N S

ON THE

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IMPORTANCE OF FORMING

THE

FEMALE CHARACTER

BY

E D U C A T I O N ;

EXTRACTED FROM THE

W O R K S

OF THE LATE

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REFLECTIONS
ON THE
IMPORTANCE OF FORMING
THE
FEMALE CHARACTER
BY
EDUCATION.

NO pains or expence are spared in teaching *man* knowledge. Not so, in teaching it to woman. But why? Are women incapable of it? By no means. There have been instances to the contrary, in every age: there are many shining ones in the present. They are what they are by education. If ignorant, it is through want of instruction, not of capacity.

It may, perhaps, be said, that they are of that sex usually stiled and allowed to be the *weaker* sex. So much the more necessity is there, then, for their being strengthened and fortified by sound precepts well inculcated, and good examples set before them.

But do not women that are become learned, make themselves ridiculous? Perhaps they may sometimes, for want of being taught the most useful part of learning, which is *discretion*. But though some do this, others do it not. They know how to manage their learning, when they have got it; and possess it, as if they possessed it not.

Women, however, are not designed to govern the state, or to command armies; to plead in Westminster-hall, or to preach in the Church; and therefore need not study the sciences leading to those several professions. But there are employments suited to them, and to which they ought to be suited; and no small degree of knowledge is required to suit them. The knowledge that is necessary for men, may not be necessary for them; but they are not, for that reason, to be left in ignorance.

A young

A young woman that is ignorant, will be idle, because she knows not what to do; if she is idle, she will soon be miserable, because, throughout the world, from the highest to the lowest, happiness consists in employment; if she is miserable, she will seek to relieve her misery by wandering abroad, running after shews and diversions. When she is arrived thus far, she may soon go farther; she may become vicious herself, and then most probably will spend the rest of her life in making others so, that have the misfortune to fall in her way. And how many these may be, who can say? The bad education of women doth generally even more mischief than that of men; since the vices of men often proceed either from the ill education they received at first from their mothers, or else from the passions which other women inspire into them at a riper age.

Female influence always has been and always must be very great in the world; and therefore it is in the power of a well educated woman, whatever be her station, to do much good in it.

How

How valuable to a family is a prudent and faithful *servant* of this sex, and of what vast importance to the temporal interests of a master or mistress has such an one proved! sometimes to interests of an higher nature. Curious to this purpose is the story told in the fifth chapter of the second book of Kings. The Syrians had invaded the land of Israel, and, among other prisoners, had brought away captive *a little maid*, and she waited on the wife of Naaman, the king of Syria's general, a man of high renown, and in great favour at court, but afflicted with a terrible and loathsome disease, the leprosy, incurable by human means. This servant, who had been educated in the true religion, and therefore knew the power of the God of Israel, and the miracles wrought by the hands of his prophets, grieved at the unhappy condition of her new master, expressed her wishes to her mistress that he would apply, for help, to Elisha. "Would God" (said she) "my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria; for he would recover him of his leprosy." The words were so remarkable, that presently, "one went in, and told his lord, saying, thus and thus said the maid, that is
" of

“ of the land of Israel.” The consequence was, that the general took a journey to the prophet, and was not only cured of his leprosy, but became a convert to the true religion, and worshipped the God of Elisha. And how often have persons in the highest stations been excited to good, or restrained from evil, at the instance or by the example of an inferior in the train of their own servants, who had been taught in early youth, what *they* perhaps had never learned, or, in the hour of passion, had forgotten !

The importance of female education will rise in our opinion, if we consider women as persons who may become *wives*, and *mistresses* of families. In this situation, they have duties to perform, which lie at the very foundation of human life ; the support or the ruin of families depends upon this conduct ; they have the direction of household affairs ; they, consequently, determine the greatest concerns of mankind, and form the good or evil manners of almost all the world. A judicious woman, that is diligent and religious, is the very soul of a house ; she gives orders for the good things of this life, and for those too of eternity.

eternity. Men themselves, who have all the authority in public, cannot yet by their deliberations establish any effectual good, without the concurrent assistance of women to carry them into execution. Besides their authority and their continual attendance in their houses, they have the advantage of being by nature careful, attentive to particulars, industrious, insinuating, and persuasive. And how can the men hope for any content in life, if their strictest friendship and alliance, which is that of marriage, be turned into disappointment and bitterness?

But a matter of more weight is still behind. As *mothers*, women have, for some time, and that the most critical time too, the care of the education of their children of both sorts, who, in the next age, are to make up the great body of the world. And as the health and strength, or sickness and weakness of our bodies, are very much owing to *their* methods of treating us when we were young; so the soundness or folly of our minds are not less owing to those first tempers and ways of thinking, which we eagerly received from the love, tenderness, authority, and constant conversation

tion of our mothers. As we call our first language our *mother* tongue, so we may as justly call our first tempers our *mother* tempers ; and perhaps it may be found more easy to forget the language than to part entirely with those tempers, which we learnt in the nursery.

That mothers, where they themselves have been well instructed, are more *capable* than men, of teaching their children, will appear from these considerations—First, from their circumstances and condition of life: they are more within doors ; have more time to spare ; are best acquainted with their children's tempers ; and always have them in their eye. Secondly, they have an advantage from their own make and frame of mind ; they are generally more apprehensive of danger, and of what may come hereafter, than men are. This makes them more concerned for their children's everlasting welfare, and solicitous to teach them what they know themselves. Then, they are of a milder disposition ; can bear with their children's infirmities, and correct them with a tenderness which even recommends a necessary severity. By this means

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their children come to love them, and to be fond of their instruction, and to imitate their example. Besides all this, they are more patient of this kind of labour than men are. It is not the child's dulness, nor the necessity of often repeating the same things, that will weary or discourage the pious mother. And, which is not to be omitted, she has an opportunity of seeing whether her instructions are apprehended and followed; of destroying vices, while they are in the bud; as also, of encouraging every commendable word and action, in its season.

In one word—The mothers have an opportunity, both by their instruction and example, of fixing such lasting impressions upon their children's minds, as, by the blessing of God upon their endeavours, neither the iniquity of the age, nor the enemy of mankind, shall ever be able to blot out*.

Some

* " A proper and effectual education of the female sex is
 " one of the very first steps to be taken for the effect-
 " tual improvement and civilization of the whole empire.
 " For children fall inevitably into the hands and under
 " the care of women, in their infant state : therefore their
 " first

Some very remarkable facts, confirming what has been said, deserve your utmost attention.

At this day, the children of Jews are always under the mother's care and instruction, if living, till they come to a certain age; during which time, they are taught to read the law, and so well instructed in its worth, and aim, and meaning, that they are very hardly, if ever, brought over to Christianity, either by the temporal or spiritual advantages which attend it.

One of the deputies, at the synod of Dort, informed that assembly, that in his country there was scarce a person, how poor and mean soever his condition was, but could read, and give a tolerable account of his faith. This, he said, was owing chiefly to the great care that had been taken to instruct the *women*,

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who

“ first and strongest impressions will be good or bad, salutary or destructive, according to the morals, character, and conduct of those women, under whose early tuition they may fall.” Dr. Brown's sketch of a plan of legislation for the Russian empire, given in the *Biographia Britannica*. Vol. ii. 664. 2d. edit.

who, when they came to be mothers, scarce ever failed to instruct their children.

St. Paul, addressing himself to his beloved Timothy, has these remarkable words—"That I may be filled with joy, when I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also." You see, that the faith and piety, here commended and gloried in, were continued and propagated in the family by the women *chiefly*. That "unfeigned faith," and that zeal for the glory of God, which was found in Timothy, and which qualified him for a Bishop or Overseer in the church of God, was derived to *him* from his *mother* and *grandmother*, whose instruction and example he followed; and so became an instrument of great good to the world.

Nor are examples wanting among ourselves of virtue and piety, the fear and the blessing of God, continued in families for many generations, by the religious care and concern of mothers, that have had a christian education; who, however they may excuse themselves from
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some other labours, which attend the bringing up of their children, if they neglect *this*, are inexcusable; neither the tenderness of their constitution, nor the care of their families (much less the pleasures of the world); neither their quality on the one hand, nor their poverty on the other, will ever free them from the guilt, and infamy, and curse, which will attend those, who shall suffer their children to grow up, without principles, and without morality.

To the foregoing considerations it may be added, that virtue is not more the business of men, than it is of women, who are the one half of the human race, redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, and designed for eternal life. They are to live for themselves; they have as great a share in the rational nature as men have; they have as much reason to pretend to, and as much necessity to aspire after, the highest accomplishments of a christian and solid virtue, as the gravest and wisest among christian philosophers. When we spoil them by a wrong education, we spoil that part of the world, which would otherwise, perhaps, furnish most instances of an eminent and exalted goodness; since they are naturally possessed

fessed of tempers and dispositions, which, if duly improved by proper studies, and sober methods of education, would, in all probability, carry them to greater heights of piety, than are to be found among the generality of men. That women have no souls, is an assertion, which might proceed from the teacher of a *false* religion : by the Founder of the *true*, they are regarded in a very different light. To them were communicated the first tidings of his resurrection, and they had the honour to be appointed apostles to the apostles themselves.

Whether, therefore, we consider the capacities of women for attaining *knowledge* ; or the sad consequences of their being left in *ignorance*, their influence on society, as *servants*, as *wives*, as *mistresses of families*, and as *mothers* ; or their constituting the *one half of the human race*, *redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ*, and *designed for eternal life* ; every way is evident the great importance of forming the female character by education.—To exhibit a picture of that character, as it ought to appear, when formed, was the

II. Thing

II. Thing proposed.—The picture with which I shall present you, among other advantages, has that of antiquity. It was drawn by a masterly hand near three thousand years ago. It may be necessary therefore to remove some of the effects of time, and retouch the lines that have been clouded and obscured by length of years; in plain terms, to explain some parts of the description, which relate to antient manners and customs, and shew how they may be usefully applied to those of our own age and country. The description I mean, is that, left us of a virtuous woman, by the wisest of men, in the last chapter of the book of Proverbs; a description, which all mothers and mistresses should teach the female pupils under their care, to read, and learn by heart.

Prov. xxxi. 10. "Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies." Such an one is to be found, but not without some care and diligence in the search. She is well worth the pains taken in the forming her, and more to be valued by her happy possessor, than the brightest diamond in the mines of the East.

II.—"The

11.—“ The heart of her husband doth
“ safely trust in her, so that he shall have no
“ need of spoil.” A well nurtured woman is
man’s best and truest friend. Her fidelity is
inviolable as the covenant of the most High,
and her purity unsullied as the light of heaven.
Absent, as well as present, her husband re-
lies upon her, for the preservation of his pos-
sessions, and of herself, the dearest and most
precious of all. With such a steward at home,
freed from care and anxiety he goes forth to
his own employment, whatever it may be.
He has no occasion to rob others by sea or
land; to plunder provinces, or starve nations.
Instead of her squandering his substance to
gratify her own vanity and folly, the œco-
nomy of his wife furnishes the supplies, and
nothing is wanting in due time and place.

12.—“ She will do him good, and not evil,
“ all the days of her life.”—She will never
abuse this confidence reposed in her, but en-
deavour to render herself daily more and
more worthy of it. And even if her endea-
vours should not always meet with the desired
success; if the good man should sometimes
happen to be a little out of spirits, or out of
temper,

temper, she will not therefore become so too. Her cheerfulness will revive and restore him. She will still "do him good and not evil," while he lives; and if she survive him, will continue to shew the same kind attention and regard to his family, and to his character. "My "Servius" (said the Roman Valeria, holding in her arms the urn which contained the ashes of her husband—my Servius) "though dead to "the rest of the world, can never be other-
"wife than alive to me."

Solomon's description of a virtuous woman consists of twenty-two verses. It is well worthy your observation, that eleven of these verses (half the number) are taken up in setting forth her *industry*, and the effects of it. I shall recite all these together, that you may see what a variety of magnificent language is made use of, to describe her different employments, to recommend simplicity of manners, and make good housewifery and honest labour to be admired, in the rich and noble, as well as the poor and obscure among women. For you must bear in mind, that in works of the several kinds here mentioned, queens and princesses of old time, disclaimed not to be occupied.

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cupied. You will likewise be pleased to consider, that if the rich are exempted from the necessity of working for *themselves*, they cannot be better employed than in working for the *poor*; since “the coats and garments”, made by the charity of Dorcas, were judged the best proofs of her goodness, that could be submitted to the inspection of an apostle.”

13.—“She seeketh wool and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. 19. She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. 17. She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms. 15. She riseth also, while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. 27. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. 21. She is not afraid of the snow for her household, for they are all clothed with double garments. 22. She maketh herself coverings of tapestry, her clothing is silk and purple. 24. She maketh fine linen, and selleth it, and delivereth girdles to the merchant. 18. She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night. 14. She

“ She is like the merchant ships, she bringeth
“ her food from afar. 16. She considereth
“ a field, and buyeth it ; with the fruit of
“ her hands she planteth a vineyard.”—On
account of this her marvellous and uncea-
sing diligence, with the many and great ad-
vantages derived thereby to her family, well
may it be said, as it is said of her 25. “ Strength
“ and honour are her cloathing, and she shall
“ rejoice in time to come.”

But the honour is not confined to herself.
It extendeth to her friend and companion in
life ; 23. “ Her husband is known in the gates,
“ when he sitteth among the elders of the
“ land”—that is, he is known as her husband ;
as a man blessed with such a wife ; as indebted,
perhaps, for his promotion, to the wealth
acquired by her management at home (for ho-
nours are seldom open to the poor) ; for the
splendor and elegance of his apparel, to the
labour of her hands ; and, it may be, for the
preservation and establishment of his virtue
and integrity, to the encouragement, in all
that is holy, and just, and good, furnished by
her example, as well as by her conversation,
the nature of which is thus described.

26.—“ She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness.” She thinks before she speaks ; and therefore neither introduces a bad subject, nor disgraces a good one by an improper manner of discoursing upon it. And as charity reigns in her heart, nothing that is uncharitable proceeds out of her mouth : all is lenient and healing. To express the whole in few words, she says nothing that is foolish, and nothing that is ill-natured. But her charity is shewn in deeds as well as words.

20.—“ She stretcheth out her hand to the poor ; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.” This is yet another good effect of her œconomy and management. She is not only able to provide plentifully for her household, but has always something in store for the poor. Since what avails a charitable disposition, where vanity, folly, and extravagance have taken away the power to exert it ? In vain is “ the hand stretched out,” when there is nothing in it.

Having duly considered this finished character of the virtuous woman, we shall not be surprised

prised at the praise bestowed upon it, in the remaining verses of the chapter.

28.—“ Her children rise up, and call her
“ blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth
“ her,” saying, 29. “ Many daughters have
“ done virtuously; but thou excellest them
“ all.” Happy the children of such a mother;
they will be living proofs of the care taken by
her in their education, when she taught them
to walk, by the paths of honour and virtue,
to the mansions of rest and glory. Happy the
husband of such a wife, who sees all things
prosper under her direction, and the blessing
of heaven derived to his family through her.
They will all join in proclaiming, that among
women who do well, honour is chiefly due to
the virtuous and diligent wife, the affectionate
and sensible mother.

30.—“ Favour,” or rather, “ gracefulness is
“ deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman
“ that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.”
A graceful person, and a set of fine features,
are valuable things, but they are not always
to be trusted; they may conceal tempers and
dispositions very different from those one
should

should have expected to find : and bitterer than wormwood must then be the disappointment of the man, who has been directed in his choice by no other considerations. This, I say, *may* be the case. It is not often so, let us hope. God forbid it should. The face ought to be an index to the mind, and when all is fair without, as it is said of the king's daughter in the psalm, "all should be glorious within." But let beauty have its due praise, and suppose what you will of it—suppose all that the poets say of it be true: still, the wise man tells you, it is *vain*, it is in its nature transient, fleeting, perishing; it is the flower of the spring, which must fade in autumn; and when the blossom falls, if no fruit succeed, of what value, I pray you, is the tree? The grave is already opening for the most elegant person that moves, and the worms are in waiting to feed on the fairest face that is beholden. Labour, then, for that which endureth for ever: let your chief pains be bestowed on that part of the human composition, which shall flourish in immortal youth, when the world and all that is in it shall disappear, and come no more into mind.—“ A woman
“ that

“ that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.”

31.—“ Give her of the fruit of her hands
“ and let her own works praise her in the
“ gates.”

The crown, which her own hands have thus formed, shall be placed upon her head, as it were by general consent, even in this life, and her good deeds, celebrated in the public assemblies, shall diffuse an ardour grateful as the smell of Eden, as the cloud of frankincense ascending from the holy altar. When her task is ended, the answer of a good conscience, and the blessings of all around, sweeter than the sweetest music, shall chant her to repose; till, awakened on the great morning of the world, descending angels shall introduce this daughter of Jerusalem into the joy of her Lord.

F I N I S.



